

## **AFRICAN CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE (ACOTA) PROGRAM**

ACOTA is a State Department, Bureau of African Affairs Program. It originated in 1997 to enhance the capacity of African partner nations to participate in multinational peace support operations (PSO) in Africa. The Bureau of African Affairs' ACOTA Program Office (APO) manages the program and policies in collaboration with the Pentagon's Office of the Secretary of Defense. The program provides extensive field training for African peacekeepers plus staff training and exercises for battalion, brigade, and multinational force headquarters personnel. ACOTA also provides equipment for African PSO trainers and peacekeepers.

The decision by a partner nation to deploy ACOTA-trained troops is a sovereign national decision, but ACOTA training and equipment helps partners to make that decision. An ACOTA partner's participation in a PSO normally falls under a mandate from the United Nations, the African Union (AU), or a regional organization such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As an international partner, ACOTA seeks to complement and support British, French, Dutch, Canadian, EU, NATO, Belgian, Portuguese and other allied peacekeeping training efforts, welcoming their participation in training events.

The ACOTA training program is based on UN-approved Programs of Instruction (POI). Typical training packages include PSO command and staff operations skills, PSO command post exercises and PSO soldier skills field training. A keystone of the ACOTA program is that all training and equipping is tailored to match an individual partner's needs and capabilities. Training includes extensive "train-the-trainer" activities to establish an enduring PSO training capacity in each partner nation. Maintenance of trainer skills and refresher training as required are part of the long-term ACOTA program.

ACOTA introduces the host military to a range of PSO tasks, such as small unit leadership, convoy escort, checkpoint operations, disarmament operations, safe weapons handling, management of refugees and internally displaced persons, negotiations, rules of engagement and command and control. Respect for international standards of human rights is a fundamental concept incorporated throughout the training. ACOTA stresses Human Rights, HIV/AIDS awareness, gender-based violence, child exploitation, and trafficking-in-persons, among other humanitarian issues. One ACOTA training tool is computer-assisted simulation, which tests command staff and peacekeepers elements on main principles.

As of 15 March 2009, ACOTA has provided training and non-lethal training equipment to 154,501 peacekeepers from African partner militaries since May 1997. ACOTA partners or TCCs include Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. These partners have sent peacekeeping contingents to varied missions such as Sudan (AMIS, UNAMID and UNMIS), Sierra Leone (ECOWAS and UNAMSL), Congo (MONUC), Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic (MISAB and MINURCA), Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE), Cote d'Ivoire (ECOWAS and UNOCI), Liberia (ECOWAS and UNMIL), Burundi (OMIB and ONUB), Kosovo (UNMIK), Beirut (UNAFIL), Somalia (AMISOM) and humanitarian relief efforts in Mozambique.

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